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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUANDA 000193

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [AO](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: PAPAL VISIT RAISED TOUGH ISSUES; DOS SANTOS
OFFERED FRANK RESPONSES

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Classified By: Ambassador Dan Mozena for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In his March 20-23 visit to Angola, Pope Benedict XVI addressed national reconciliation, poverty alleviation, transparency and anti-corruption in public events with as many as two million participants. The official reaction to this message was strikingly responsive, with President Jose Eduardo dos Santos acknowledging--in the most explicit terms yet--the magnitude of poverty in Angola and the government's struggles with corruption. Pope Benedict's visit was overall a well-executed major international event, despite the deaths of two would-be spectators in the crush of people to attend. The Pope's visit contributed importantly to stimulating debate on political and human rights issues as well as spiritual. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Pope Benedict's four day visit to Luanda, the first by a Pope since the resumption of armed conflict in 1992, received broad and enthusiastic participation from the population and the state. The Angolan authorities organized the visit effectively and professionally, managing the participation of nearly two million Angolans. In a March 25 meeting with the Ambassador, Papal Nuncio Angelo Becciu agreed with the public assessment of the visit as smooth and well organized, with the cooperation of Church officials, government ministries, and the security services. Becciu noted, however, that the Pope and the Church were deeply saddened by the deaths of two Angolan women in a trampling incident in the hours before the Pope addressed the faithful at a local soccer stadium. Becciu suggested the incident was caused by an insufficient number of open doors in the stadium and poor crowd control.

Taking on Africa's problems

¶3. (U) The Pope spoke directly about building a more prosperous, just, and democratic society in Africa as a whole. In his arrival speech, he called for a freer and more peaceful Africa. Addressing Angolans in particular, he noted the country's natural wealth and military strength, but warned that Angolans must not yield to the "law of the strongest," a reference to corruption and abuse of power that he made more explicit by speaking about income inequalities and abuses of the poor and their rights. He called on both civil society and the government of Angola to take action.

¶4. (C) The Pope extended his call for more effective governance in his address to the political authorities and diplomatic corps held at the Presidential Palace following his meeting with President Dos Santos, saying it was up to political leaders to free their people from "the scourges of

greed, violence and unrest" and to lead them with the civic-democratic principles of "respect and promotion of human rights, transparent governance, an independent judiciary, a free press, a civil service of integrity, a properly functioning network of schools and hospitals, and--most pressing--a determination born from the conversion of hearts to excise corruption once and for all." (Note: Although the Pope applied these comments to Africa as a whole, his concerns were meant and perceived by the attendees as a harsh comment on Angola. End note.)

Dos Santos's "Confession"

15. (SBU) Seemingly aware of the content of the Pope's remarks, Dos Santos, in opening the session at the Presidential Palace, was candid and frank in acknowledging Angola's problems. Dos Santos quantified the economic and social challenges facing Angola, saying Angola's rate of poverty is 40 percent and its rate of unemployment is 28 percent. Dos Santos said that 60 percent of Angolans do not have access to clean drinking water, 50 percent do not have access to energy, and a further 50 percent do not live in suitable housing.

16. (C) On corruption, Dos Santos said Angola must "clearly separate private business from the business of the State and confront with fortitude the improper appropriation of the goods of the State by its officials." On poverty, Dos Santos called for a "more just fiscal policy" involving more redistribution of wealth from the elites to the poor, "the other great challenge that we face." Making light of Dos Santos's own involvement over the years in the very practices that the Pope had condemned, the Papal Nuncio joked to the Ambassador that Dos Santos's speech was "as if the President

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were giving a confession of his sins."

Radio Ecclesia off the table?

17. (C) Several privately-owned weekly papers carried analytic articles predicting the Pope would take on the status of church-owned Radio Ecclesia, a strong independent voice for civil society and open debate, which is prohibited from broadcasting outside of Luanda, where state-run Radio Nacional has a monopoly. Many in the public and media were disappointed when the Pope was silent on the issue and when Bishop Filomeno Vieira Dias, chief organizer of the visit, subsequently made a statement that it was strictly between the Angolan church and the government. With a different take, the Papal Nuncio told us that Radio Ecclesia had in fact been on the agenda for the Pope's private meeting with Dos Santos, but that the Pope simply did not have time to broach the subject. The Papal Nuncio said the status of Radio Ecclesia remains on the Vatican's agenda.

18. (C) Comment: The Pope succeeded in energizing the faithful and bringing important political issues to the forefront. Judging from Dos Santos's surprising frankness about poverty, unemployment, and even corruption in reaction to the Pope's call for building a freer society, the visit engaged Angola's leader publicly on the nation's most fundamental challenges. The President's frank acknowledgment of these problems should lead to improved conditions for public debate of them. As such, the Pope's visit paid rich dividends in the political and human rights arenas, as well as the spiritual. End Comment.
MOZENA